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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3341
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5576
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3295
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3160
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3819
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3829

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASHGABAT 001065

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/24/2019

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: WOMEN PASTORS "NEED NOT APPLY" AS
RELIGIOUS LEADERS

REF: ASHGABAT 288

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) On August 22, Political Officer met with Word of Life Church Pastor, Elena Stryukova, and church member, Anna Joratova, to discuss the church's attempts to become registered. There are currently three Word of Life/River of Life church groups in Turkmenistan located in Ashgabat, Turkmenbashi and Turkmenabat. Only the church in Turkmenabat has been able to register (reftel). The church is loosely affiliated with the charismatic Word of Life church based in Uppsala, Sweden, as well as with the Moscow branch of the same organization. The group was started in Ashgabat 11 years ago by missionaries visiting from Moscow and has never had registration in Turkmenistan.

2. (C) The Ashgabat group has been trying to register for more than one year. It first submitted its application to the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) in June 2008. (NOTE: Groups seeking registration first submit an application to the CRA. The CRA either reviews the application and forwards it to the Ministry of Justice for approval, or, if there are problems with the application, returns it to the applicant for revision. END NOTE.) The CRA reviewed the application for six months, after which it rejected the application. Officially, the grounds for rejection were inconsistencies between the Russian and Turkmen language versions. Informally, Stryukova, who was named as the group's leader in the application, was told that a "religious leader (imam) cannot be a woman." The group's second application, which named a male member as the group's leader, was also rejected because of inconsistencies between the Russian and Turkmen versions. A third application was submitted at the end of July, for which the group obtained a certified official translation of the application. Stryukova said group members prepare the application themselves and that no lawyer would assist a Christian group with the registration process.

3. (C) According to Stryukova, the group has about 30 members, but for purposes of the application, the group included only nine names on the required list of members. Among the nine named individuals, two worked for the government. Following submission of the application, one of

the government-employed members was forced to resign from his job. Stryukova said state security agents put pressure on the employee's director to dismiss him, and the director had no choice but to ask for his resignation. The group itself cannot meet together openly. They gather in small groups of 3-4 persons, consciously maintaining a low profile. Stryukova said the government knows about the group's activities and could stop them if it wanted, but that "there is no real reason to harass them."

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Despite the delays and difficulties, Pastor Stryukova did not appear overly discouraged about the prospects for registration, pointing to the eventual success of the Turkmenabat group. Still, given the difficulties encountered just trying to get past the CRA, it is clear that the group's registration process, even if eventually successful, will be exceedingly drawn-out. While Turkmen law does not prohibit female religious leaders, the CRA apparently has its own, unwritten standards, which it applies in reviewing applications. Such circumstances undermine the notion that there is law-governed process by which these groups can obtain registration. END COMMENT.

MILES